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The Huntsville Times

There's work ahead, but Redstone and region are in great shape

Saturday, August 27, 2005 Huntsville Times

Some obstacles remain, but the Huntsville strategists involved in the marathon work to support Redstone Arsenal and North Alabama in this latest round of recommendations by the Base realignment and Closure Commission are cheering quietly.

Some 1,750 or so federal jobs - and potentially as many as 3,000 more contracting jobs – are within reach.

What remains is for President Bush to get the commission's recommendations by Sept. 8 and to accept or reject them in totality. If he accepts them, Congress has 45 days to accept or reject the recommendations as a whole.

Specifically, the commission on Wednesday recommended moving the headquarters of the Army Materiel Command to Redstone. On Thursday, it decided to move the headquarters of the Space & Missile Command here, as well as most of the work being done by the Missile Defense Agency.

Redstone will also gain a helicopter test center - at the expense of Fort Rucker and Robins AFB in Georgia. An Atlanta unit - the 2nd Recruiting Brigade - will also come here.

It wasn't all gains. A munitions and ordnance school and a robotics office, both now at Redstone, will go elsewhere. But the net effect is a resounding economic boost for Huntsville and North Alabama.

The Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee, which literally has been working for years to lobby not only for Redstone's preservation but growth, will continue to monitor the BRAC report. Its job is made infinitely easier by the fact that from now on, it's an all-or-nothing proposition. The

And the debt that North Alabama owes to the local BRAC committee and those who have
helped it prepare for this advance is incalculable. The time and money has been well-spent.
Not to have done so would have been to consign the future to happenstance.

It's helped, of course, that Redstone Arsenal has proved its value to this nation's military time
and again in the spheres of aviation and missiles. And the bond between the military base and
the community is, if not unique, certainly extremely rare.

Perhaps U.S. Rep. Bud Cramer, D-Huntsville, summed it up best: "North Alabama presented
an excellent proposal highlighting Redstone's strengths and the daily contributions people
working there make to our national security."

Now that most of the nation's missile defense work will be centered here, Redstone Arsenal
takes on added importance to our nation. This should help it down the road when other times
require more changes and renovations to keep the U.S. military second to none.

Some day, supporters of the arsenal and those with the vision and fortitude to work in
Redstone's - and this area's - behalf will once again have to emphasize the base's strengths
and its importance.

When that day comes, North Alabama will be truly lucky if those who lead the fight can
accomplish as much as the Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee has done.

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